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President: Mr. Udovenko ..... (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 41

Assistance in mine clearance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/679)

Draft resolution (A/52/L.69)

The President: Today, the General Assembly begins consideration of a very important agenda item: "Assistance in mine clearance". Five years ago the Assembly addressed this issue for the first time and remains seized with it today because of the real humanitarian disaster caused by the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines.

The Secretary-General's annual report gives us the impressive dimensions and magnitude of this problem — 110 million unexploded landmines still lie silent in more than 70 countries waiting for their prey. Approximately 2 million more are laid each year while only 100,000 are cleared. Thus, for every mine cleared, 20 more are laid.

Landmines are a serious impediment to the efforts of nations weakened by conflicts to rebuild their societies. Landmines stand in the way of recultivation of lands and prevent people from returning to their homes. It is shocking to hear that more women and children are killed, wounded and maimed by the explosion of landmines after a ceasefire than during the actual conflict.

I fully associate myself with the conclusion of the Secretary-General in his 1997 report that:

> "only an integrated and holistic response to the issue of landmine contamination, and its multifaceted humanitarian, and socio-economic consequences, is capable of bringing real and lasting benefits to those who are considered at risk from these weapons." [A/52/679, para. 4]

It is my sincere hope that today's discussion will further contribute to the efforts of the international community in fighting this global problem.

I now call on the representative of Luxembourg to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.69.

Mr. Wolzfeld (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): First of all, I have the honour to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.69 dealing with assistance in mine clearance, on behalf of its sponsors. Andorra, Angola, Armenia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Uruguay have also indicated that they intend to sponsor this draft resolution.

The indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines is the cause of the mutilation and death of tens of thousands of people every year, including many women and children. Landmines exact a high human, social, economic and environmental cost and make it difficult to create the conditions needed for sustainable development in afflicted regions.

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Through the draft resolution before the Assembly, the international community would reaffirm its concern at this unacceptable situation and undertake to remedy it as soon as possible. The Assembly would also note recent international initiatives, including the Oslo Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which try to give a concerted response to this humanitarian problem.

Mr. Eshmambetova (Kyrgyzstan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The international community, be it through Governments or through non-governmental organizations, is devoting significant human and financial resources to assistance in mine clearance, which by its very nature is a long-term task. The draft resolution recognizes this commitment and emphasizes the importance of assistance for the socio-economic rehabilitation of landmine victims. The draft resolution also recognizes the important role of the United Nations system in the coordination of activities related to mine clearance, in raising the awareness of populations and the world public of this problem, and in assistance in mine clearance. The success of the efforts of the United Nations system depends largely on adequate coordination which ensures a coherent, integrated approach to mine clearance activities and optimum use of resources and operational capacity. Moreover, the draft resolution encourages the Secretary-General to pursue his efforts to develop a comprehensive mine-clearance strategy for the United Nations system, which should enable it to carry out its functions as efficiently as possible.

In trying to resolve the problem of anti-personnel landmines, the international community is merely supplementing its efforts in the area of humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. In this spirit, we hope that this draft resolution will be adopted by the General Assembly by consensus.

Now I would like to make a statement on behalf of the European Union on agenda item 41, entitled "Assistance in mine clearance". The countries of Central and Eastern Europe that are associated with the European Union, including Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and the associated country, Cyprus, and Iceland and Liechtenstein have aligned themselves with this statement.

During our debate today, we will be examining the humanitarian dimension of the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines. Every year, these mines maim and kill tens of thousands of people, including many women and children. The worst hit are people living in rural areas — children who mistake small mines for toys, women and men working in the fields. In some cases, the presence of mines seriously hinders humanitarian assistance to populations that are the victims of conflicts. Peacekeeping, the consolidation of peace, rehabilitation and reconstruction in post-conflict situations are often made extremely difficult in these circumstances. These adverse effects make it clear why we need to ban the production and use of anti-personnel landmines.

Worse still, human, social, economic and environmental costs are high and make it difficult to create the conditions needed for sustainable development in afflicted regions.

In this discussion, our attention is focused on the humanitarian and developmental consequences of the proliferation and use of anti-personnel landmines. Although statistics regarding the number of unexploded anti-personnel landmines are not yet final, there are an estimated 110 million unexploded landmines in over 70 countries. About 2 million more are laid each year while only 100,000 are cleared. Thus for every mine cleared, twenty more are laid. Worse still, these mines are easily obtainable, often costing less than $2 each. The cost of clearing each of them, however, is between $300 and $1,000. The scale of the problem is therefore obvious.

The international community is devoting considerable human and financial resources to assistance in mine clearing, which by its very nature is a long-term job; to efficient mine clearance programmes in which the primary emphasis needs to be on helping the afflicted countries to develop national mine clearance capability; to mine-awareness programmes; and to the rehabilitation and reintegration into society of landmine victims.

It is particularly important that countries receiving assistance pledge not to use anti-personnel landmines. The extent to which the United Nations should be called upon to provide assistance in mine clearance must take account of how far the parties involved are themselves able to take on this obligation.

The European Union welcomes the increased importance which the United Nations is giving to mine clearance. We wish to emphasize the role played by the

United Nations Secretariat in the field of mine clearance from the point of view of defining policies and priorities, as well as from the operational and coordination point of view. The success of the efforts of the United Nations system depends largely on adequate coordination to ensure a coherent and integrated approach to mine clearance activities and on the full and effective use of resources and operational capacity. In this context, we welcome the decision to make the Department of Peacekeeping Operations the focal point for mine-clearance activities within the United Nations system. We are convinced that the humanitarian aspect of such activities will continue to be of the utmost importance and may even be strengthened. In this context, coordination with non-governmental organizations, which are playing an increasingly important role in mine clearance activities, is also essential. Finally, it is important that the affected countries themselves have a coordinated and coherent approach to mine-clearance programmes.

In November 1997, the European Union adopted a Joint Action regarding anti-personnel landmines in which it expressed its resolve to reach the target of totally eliminating anti-personnel landmines and to work actively towards the early conclusion of an effective international agreement banning these arms throughout the world. The European Union has vigorously pursued this goal. We also welcome the follow-up activity to the Ottawa International Strategy Conference, in particular at the Vienna and Bonn seminars and during the Brussels International Conference for a Total Ban on Anti-personnel Landmines.

We welcome the adoption in Oslo on September 18 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and its opening for signature in Ottawa on 3 and 4 December 1997. The European Union will leave no stone unturned in its efforts to attain these objectives in every appropriate international forum, including the Conference on Disarmament. We also welcome the recent adoption by the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the First Committee, of three draft resolutions which will give added support to our efforts to bring about the total ban of anti-personnel mines.

The European Union gives strong support to mine clearance activities through direct involvement in programmes with afflicted countries and through assistance to bilateral initiatives, particularly those carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. Last year, the European Union decided to allocate more than ECU 40 million to mine clearance activities in 1997. Half of this amount has been contributed to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance. The European Union and its member States are the largest contributor to the Trust Fund, providing 64 per cent of the total contributions. Furthermore, support for mine clearance activities also features strongly in the bilateral programmes of the European Union member States with afflicted countries.

The European Union welcomes the recent international initiatives on landmines which have enabled us to reach a consensus on, *inter alia*, ways of dealing more effectively with mine clearance activities. Given the large number of anti-personnel landmines laid down throughout the world, the problem cannot be resolved without the development and use of new specialized equipment which will considerably enhance mine clearance techniques. The European Union attaches special importance to the development and use of appropriate technologies for mine detection and clearance. We are therefore particularly encouraged by the results of the International Conference on Mine Clearance Technology held in July 1996 in Elsinore and by those of the international conference of experts in mechanical mine clearance held in Bonn last December. The work done at those two conferences was continued at the Conference on Anti-personnel Landmines held in Tokyo in March this year. The European Union will continue to support vigorously all efforts to further improve mine clearance technology.

While acknowledging the difficulty of resolving the problem, we must also acknowledge that every effort should be made to assist mine clearance activities. In recent years there has been a significant shift in the way these weapons are perceived by the international community, a shift which saw concrete expression in the widespread recognition of the need for an international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines as soon as possible.

This year the European Union has again introduced a draft resolution under the agenda item entitled "Assistance in mine clearance", which we hope will receive broad support and be adopted by the Assembly by consensus. This would provide a clear indication of the international community's desire to deal effectively with the problem of mine clearance. Furthermore, we, for our part, are strongly committed to eliminating anti-personnel mines through a global ban and to supporting, to the greatest extent possible, efforts to mitigate the effects of the use of these mines, raise awareness and rehabilitate victims.

Anti-personnel mines remain a formidable humanitarian problem, not only because they multiply the need for humanitarian aid, but also because they place obstacles in the way of this aid, which so many need.

Mr. Fowler (Canada) (*interpretation from French*): Earlier this month the international community acted decisively to hasten an end to the carnage and misery caused by anti-personnel mines. One hundred and twenty-three countries signed in Ottawa a treaty banning the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of a tool of war accurately described as a weapon of mass destruction operating in slow motion.

This clear repudiation of anti-personnel mines was achieved by an extraordinary worldwide coalition which, in the words of the United Nations Secretary-General, shamed us and enlightened us, stripped away all excuses and showed us what we can do to solve the problem. We look forward to the continued expansion of that coalition of countries and organizations, and we hope that Member States not yet able to sign the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction will soon be able to do so. We also welcome the fact that several Member States that cannot yet sign the treaty are already taking unilateral measures to conform with its provisions.

The humanitarian crisis caused by anti-personnel mines did not end with the meeting in Ottawa, however. As the draft resolution before us makes clear, anti-personnel mines already in the ground have a devastating humanitarian impact and a profound and lasting social and economic cost. These landmines must be cleared, and those injured by them must be assisted.

Canada has worked closely with mine-affected countries by funding mine clearance, victim assistance and mine awareness and by providing expert training in mine clearance and the management of mine clearance operations. We will continue to do so. In Ottawa, Prime Minister Jean Chretien pledged 100 million Canadian dollars over the next five years for the implementation of the global ban on anti-personnel mines and to assist countries which lack the means to implement their commitments under the Convention. These funds will contribute to expanded humanitarian assistance for landmine victims, to mine clearance and to the elimination of stockpiles of mines.

Other Governments have made similar gestures of support. Some months ago, the Norwegian Government announced its commitment of $100 million. Norway has been a vital partner in the Ottawa process, along with Austria, Belgium and South Africa. More recently, the American and Japanese Governments also announced generous contributions. We hope others will be in a position to make similar commitments.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada also hosted a Mine Action Forum in conjunction with the signing ceremony for the Convention banning anti-personnel mines, from 2 to 4 December. This fully inclusive consultative exercise was not limited to countries that could sign the treaty. Rather, it engaged all interested parties in discussion of an enhanced and coordinated response by the international community in virtually all areas related to the treaty and to mine clearance and victim assistance.

The topics discussed included the ratification, implementation and broadening of support for the treaty. Attention was also given to the development of appropriate technologies for mine clearance, the establishment of sustainable mine-action centres and the treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration of landmine victims. Work also focused both on mobilizing resources for all aspects of mine clearance and on coordinating the use of those resources to ensure the best possible results.

One broad conclusion of the Mine Action Forum was that the international community can and will do more. Immediately before and during the ceremony and Forum, countries, organizations and individuals pledged new contributions and initiatives for mine action totalling half a billion Canadian dollars. Significant non-financial contributions and initiatives were also announced.

A second conclusion, flowing from the first, was that with so many countries, multilateral agencies, private donors and non-governmental organizations announcing funding commitments and planning initiatives as a follow-on to the treaty signing, there is a clear need for coordination and collaboration in managing the whole mine-action agenda. The United Nations must play the central role in this coordination process. Canada has taken the initiative of calling a meeting in March with the objective of assisting in establishing a framework for international cooperation and coordination.

Another broad conclusion was that programmes for mine surveying, mine awareness, mine clearance or victim assistance must be country-specific if they are to be successful. There are no simple formulas that can be applied without regard to the particular circumstances confronting individual mine-affected States.

There are, however, best practices to be learned from each operation, many of which may have broad application. We welcome the fact that the United Nations has sought systematically to identify lessons learned from its mine-action programmes, and we are pleased to have provided financial support for these efforts. One lesson learned is that if they are to succeed, mine-action programmes and projects must be developed in close consultation with the donors and authorities in the field and must enjoy the political support of the authorities concerned. The Cambodian authorities' leadership of the Cambodian Mine Action Centre is a model in this regard.

To be effective, mine-action programmes must also have sound management and sufficient resources for longer-term planning and implementation. There also needs to be sustained funding over a period of years, even after humanitarian demining and victim assistance come to attract less public attention than at present. Affected States bear the primary responsibility for mine action within their borders. Any assistance the international community might provide will come to naught in the absence of close collaboration on the part of the authorities in the affected countries.

A final, broad conclusion of the Ottawa Mine Action Forum was that any approach that focuses only on technical questions of treaty implementation, mine surveying, detection and clearance risks losing sight of the people involved. Our primary goal should be to protect the people who have to live with landmines and to assist the landmine survivors, their families and their communities.

Among the countries and organizations working to reverse the scourge of anti-personnel mines, special recognition is due the United Nations. We express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for the leadership the United Nations has displayed since 1988 in setting up mine-action programmes in many of the countries most adversely affected by anti-personnel mines.

Canada actively supported the work undertaken by the Mine Clearance and Policy Unit of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. We look forward to working closely with the Mine Action Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, to which the mandate of the Mine Clearance and Policy Unit has been transferred, as well as with other United Nations programmes and agencies active in this area.

We hope and trust that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations will spare no effort in undertaking its new responsibility for humanitarian demining. This is essential if progress achieved thus far is to be consolidated and expanded.

We welcome evidence we have already seen that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations will also embrace the coordination function for mine-related activities formerly undertaken by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Close cooperation and collaboration with donors and within the United Nations system is essential if the Organization is to provide effective leadership in mine action.

Canada has offered vigorous support for efforts both to ban the use of anti-personnel landmines and to address the horrendous damage they cause. My delegation is pleased to be a sponsor of the draft resolution before us, the objectives of which we wholeheartedly endorse and share.

Mr. Owada (Japan): The problem of anti-personnel landmines indiscriminately used and left behind in conflicts is one of the most urgent problems that the international community needs to address today. Most landmines have been laid in the more than 60 countries that have suffered or are currently suffering from the ravages of war and poverty. Not only do these landmines claim the lives of innocent civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel, they remain a serious obstacle to reconstruction and development during the post-conflict peace-building process. For this reason, anti-personnel landmines are very much a humanitarian concern and a threat to peace, stability and development.

In the course of 1997 significant progress has been made towards the suppression of the evils of landmines. After intensive negotiations in Oslo in September, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction was concluded. Earlier this month, in Ottawa, delegates from more than 120 countries signed this instrument, Japan among them. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines was another landmark event, one that raised public awareness about the importance of this issue.

While the political will of the international community has been successfully applied to the strengthening of the legal framework for the prohibition of landmines, we still need to work towards a substantial reduction in the number of mine victims, with the ultimate goal of achieving zero victims, and towards providing better and greater assistance to those in need.

In this regard, my delegation would like to refer to the Tokyo Conference on Anti-personnel Landmines, which was hosted by the Government of Japan last March and in which 27 countries participated, including countries that are mine-infested, members of the European Union and representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and United Nations organs, including the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Children's Fund. The participants identified three important fields in which international efforts should be strengthened: first, landmine clearance by the United Nations and other organizations; secondly, development of new technology for mine detection and removal; and, thirdly, assistance to landmine victims.

In the area of mine-clearance activities, the importance of partnership and better coordination among all the parties involved — namely, the United Nations agencies, other international organizations, mine-infested countries, donor countries and non-governmental organizations cannot be overstated. Consideration must be given to taking an integrated approach towards the reconstruction process and availing ourselves of the comparative advantages of each of the partners involved in order to enhance the effectiveness of the activities.

While international efforts need to be further strengthened, however, it is imperative to our success in removing the more than 100 million landmines that have been planted all over the world that mine-infested countries themselves make demining activities an integral part of their national rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes, thus asserting their ownership of mine-action programmes. The Cambodian Mine Action Centre can be seen as a successful example of such an endeavour, and we sincerely hope that other Mine Action Centres, such as those in Mozambique, Angola and Bosnia and Herzegovina, will follow suit and carry out mine-clearance activities in a coordinated and effective manner.

I also wish to emphasize, in this context, that it is imperative for this purpose to curb the ongoing proliferation of anti-personnel mines into areas of conflict through the export of these lethal weapons. The present situation, in which landmines are made available at about $3 each while it costs the international community between $300 and $1,000 to remove each of them, should not be tolerated. Indeed, it is tragic to see that a tremendous amount of time and money is being spent on removing mines at a much greater cost than the cost of obtaining and planting them, while a much greater number of new mines is being laid in conflict areas. This vicious circle has to stop. In this connection, I wish to point out that Japan has been strictly observing the principle of not allowing the export of arms, including landmines.

In line with the new organizational reform within the United Nations Secretariat — whereby functions related to demining activities of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs have now been transferred to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), along with responsibility for the management of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance — my delegation hopes that DPKO will take into consideration the humanitarian aspect and the developmental vision of demining activities in discharging its responsibility and give adequate attention to demining activities outside of peacekeeping operations in the new operational structure. At the same time, as many participants pointed out at both the Tokyo Conference and the Ottawa Conference, the importance of coordination in assisting demining activities has to be emphasized, and my delegation expects that DPKO will play an important role in this field.

In pursuing the objectives of preventing or reducing the tragedy of landmines and of promoting reconstruction and development in mine-infested countries, the development of usable and cost-effective technologies for mine-detection and mine clearance is critical. Participants in the Tokyo Conference recognized the value of a two-track approach in this regard. In the short term, the most appropriate and effective methods can be combined in a manner responsive to the particular conditions in each mined area. In the middle and long term, new technology should be developed to expedite mine-clearance activities and increase their effectiveness. The cardinal importance of sharing information on technology for mine detection and removal has to be stressed. My delegation hopes that DPKO will continue its efforts to establish a technology-review mechanism.

The last, but not at all least important, issue to which I should like to turn is that of assistance to landmine victims. The medical, economic and social sufferings visited upon those whose lives have been affected by landmines require wider recognition and increased assistance and must be addressed as a matter of great urgency. The international community should join hands in helping mine-infested countries develop the national capacity to manage and execute comprehensive programmes, which should consist of first aid, surgery, the manufacture of artificial limbs, rehabilitation, and vocational and reintegration training.

It is noteworthy that the International Committee of the Red Cross has started to establish a mine-information system in Afghanistan and Angola, through which information can be collected and analysed systematically at the local level so that it will become possible to understand every aspect of assistance and prevention. My delegation hopes that the system will achieve its intended objectives and that similar systems will be established in other mine-infested countries.

Japan continues to support the international efforts for clearing landmines and for providing victims with assistance. To date, Japan has contributed close to $35 million to the mine-clearance activities of the United Nations and other organizations, including the contribution to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance, assistance to mine-clearance activities in such countries as Afghanistan, Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, Angola, Mozambique and Tajikistan, and assistance for the Organization of American States mine-clearing project in Nicaragua. Japan will also provide support for the workshop for mine-infested countries hosted by the Government of Cambodia. In addition, the Government of Japan is also considering extending further assistance to landmine victims in the form of bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

In the same spirit but with much greater vigour, Prime Minister Hashimoto has recently announced that the Government of Japan would be providing assistance amounting to ¥10 billion — approximately $80 million — over the next five years in order to intensify its efforts in these areas. In taking this new initiative, Japan has the following objectives in mind: first, to strengthen and improve the United Nations ability to coordinate assistance for demining activities through financial contributions; secondly, to provide mine-infested countries with devices for mine detection and removal and other necessary equipment; thirdly, to enhance technical cooperation for the manufacture of artificial limbs and rehabilitation of mine victims; and fourthly, to provide facilities and equipment for medical treatment and rehabilitation. As a part of this new initiative, Japan has formulated a new guideline that will enable devices and equipment for humanitarian mine clearance to be shipped to mine-infested countries.

Mine clearance is very much an area in which civil society can play a significant role, and many non-governmental organizations, including those in Japan, have been active in developing new technologies for mine clearance, assisting mine victims and raising public awareness on this subject. The Government of Japan supports the activities of the non-governmental organizations in this field. In Cambodia these activities include the establishment of a centre for the manufacture of artificial limbs, dispatch of experts to the centre, the establishment of a rehabilitation centre and the provision of vocational training. Let me mention in this connection that the second non-governmental organization Tokyo conference on mine clearance is being planned for January 1998.

Draft resolution A/52/L.69, which was introduced earlier by the representative of Luxembourg on behalf of the European Union, reflects the strong concern felt by Member States on this important issue and contains constructive proposals that stress the need for coordinated efforts by the international community. My delegation is honoured to join in cosponsoring the draft resolution and hopes that, as in previous years, it will be adopted without a vote.

International joint efforts by Member States, the United Nations and its agencies, international organizations and civil society should be further strengthened so that we may attain our common goal of eventually creating a world free of all anti-personnel landmines. I wish to assure the Assembly that Japan, for its part, will spare no effort in pursuing this goal.

Mr. Biørn Lian (Norway): The Norwegian Government shares the deep concern of the world community with respect to the use of anti-personnel mines in conflict areas. The primary victims of these mines continue to be unarmed civilians, particularly children and women. Anti-personnel landmines have devastating effects by making large areas in many countries inaccessible for decades. They prevent refugees and the internally displaced from returning home and impair chances of social and economic development. Determined international efforts to ban the use of anti-

personnel mines are a response to this serious and pressing humanitarian issue.

While Norway certainly recognizes the need to expand mine-clearance capacity and to improve mine-clearance technology, we know that there are financial and technological limits to what can be achieved. The single most effective measure to overcome these limits is to establish a comprehensive ban. Prevention is always more effective than cure. Norway therefore warmly welcomes the signing by 122 States in Ottawa in December of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

There has been massive international support for a convention on a total ban on anti-personnel mines. The mounting pressure from international public opinion gave momentum to the Ottawa process. I would like to highlight in this context the major role played by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). The systematic efforts of ICBL made a substantial contribution to giving the process momentum and significantly increased the general support for the Convention. It is most fitting that the Nobel Peace Prize for 1997 was awarded to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and to the campaign's coordinator, Jody Williams, for their efforts to ban and clear anti-personnel mines. The award is well deserved and will provide inspiration to the efforts to gain universal support for the Convention.

The Oslo Diplomatic Conference in September 1997 clearly showed that the Ottawa process has proved to be the most powerful instrument for achieving the goal of a comprehensive ban sooner rather than later. The Convention, successfully negotiated in Oslo, will be an excellent practical tool in the joint efforts to end the suffering caused by anti-personnel mines. It represents a clear norm and encourages nations to take the necessary measures to eliminate all anti-personnel landmines.

The Convention also recognizes the enormous challenges faced by mine-affected countries in meeting the commitments under the Convention by providing a political framework for international assistance and technical cooperation in the fields of mine clearance, stockpile destruction and the mapping and marking of mine areas until they are cleared. Recognition of the need for special attention to the victims of anti-personnel mines — from rehabilitation to effective long-term social and economic reintegration — has been explicitly included in the Convention. The Convention will serve as an instrument to mobilize and allocate resources to this end. The needs of landmine victims are enormous and only a concerted approach can help those whose lives have been so tragically affected by anti-personnel mines. Together with others, Norway will intensify its efforts regarding demining and mine-victim assistance.

The meeting of Foreign Ministers in Ottawa a few weeks ago represented the conclusion of the first phase of the Ottawa process. The second phase must be to make the Convention universal and implement its humanitarian goals. We hope that States not yet in a position to sign the Convention will take interim measures to prohibit, restrict or suspend the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines.

Norway has provided substantial humanitarian assistance for mine-related activities for a number of years. Over the last three and a half years, from 1994 to today, its assistance has amounted to approximately $38 million. In 1996, Norway spent in excess of $14 million in support of mine-related activities. Norwegian assistance has included mine clearance, training of local personnel, mine awareness and assistance for landmine victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mozambique, Angola, Afghanistan, Cambodia, northern Iraq and Croatia. The assistance has mainly been channelled through the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

For its part, the Norwegian Government is prepared to allocate another $100 million over the next five years to mine clearance and mine-victim assistance. Furthermore, Norway is ready to contribute expert personnel to the stand-by capacity of the United Nations mine-assistance programmes through the Norwegian Emergency Preparedness Systems. We are also ready to assist on missions and provide personnel and resources to initiate United Nations mine-clearance and mine-awareness programmes.

I launch an appeal today to those Governments that have not yet done so to consider adhering to the Convention signed by 122 States in Ottawa. I also launch an appeal to all those among us who are in a position to do so to come together and make further efforts to increase contributions to vital international demining efforts and to assist the many children, women and men who are already or will become victims of anti-personnel landmines. My delegation is a sponsor of the draft resolution before us, the important objectives of which we fully support.

Mr. Richardson (United States of America): The item before us today, "Assistance in mine clearance", is of profound importance to my Government and to the international community.

One of the cruellest legacies of conflict in the modern era is the continuing presence of deadly landmines. Long after a conflict has ended, these hidden killers undermine the rebuilding of society, economic development and the return of refugees. In more than 60 countries around the globe, children and other innocent civilians risk loss of life and limb from uncleared landmines.

Earlier this month in Ottawa, representatives of over 120 countries gathered not only to sign the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, but also to work together to rid the world of the threat to civilians posed by landmines already in the ground.

The United States remains a leader in the fight against landmines. We are taking concrete steps to eliminate these deadly weapons, and we fully support a renewed international commitment to rid the world of them. The United States was not able to sign the treaty because of current commitments to protect the sovereignty of other countries. However, our commitment to humanitarian demining is unwavering, but only through the effective coordination of assistance efforts will we be successful.

At this very podium, only three years ago, President Clinton called on the nations of the world to eliminate all anti-personnel landmines. The United Nations took up the President's call and adopted this goal. Since then, international support to protect civilians from the dangers of landmines has grown exponentially. United States Senator Patrick Leahy has been a tireless advocate in our own Government for landmine victims, and we are grateful for his dedication to this noble cause.

In addition, many countries and non-governmental organizations are making vital contributions towards the goal of banning anti-personnel landmines and removing forever their threat to innocent civilians, including children, all over the world, but all of us together must do more.

I am proud to note that the United States is the leader in humanitarian demining worldwide. Since 1993, we have devoted $153 million to that purpose. Our experts have assisted 14 countries in removing landmines from their territories. In the past six months we have included three new countries — Chad, Lebanon and Yemen — and we plan to add Guatemala and Zimbabwe shortly. In fact, the United States is training and equipping about one quarter of those engaged in demining around the world, and we are continuing to increase our commitment, but all of us together must do more.

The Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense announced a new United States initiative to ensure that civilians in every country, on every continent, are secure from the threat of landmines by the end of the next decade. This means not only initiating and continuing global humanitarian demining efforts, as resolved by the General Assembly in 1993, but also accelerating and expanding these efforts with the goal of completing the process by the year 2010.

The Demining 2010 Initiative, through United States and international leadership, will seek to coordinate these efforts by bringing together donors, demining experts and national mine action centres in order to expand substantially actual demining operations and related programmes, to enhance the exchange of demining information and demining technology and to ensure the most effective use of worldwide demining resources.

President Clinton has asked Ambassador Karl Inderfurth, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, to serve as a Special Representative of the President and the Secretary of State for global humanitarian demining. Many of you will remember Ambassador Inderfurth for his service as United States Representative for Special Political Affairs to the United Nations and Deputy United States Representative on the United Nations Security Council. Here at the United Nations, Ambassador Inderfurth first became directly involved with the landmine issue, working with Secretary of State Albright while she was the United States Permanent Representative. He was charged by our Government with the responsibility for obtaining General Assembly approval of United States-sponsored landmine resolutions, progressing from the 1993 call for export moratoria on anti-personnel landmines to the 1996 call on the international community to begin negotiations on a total ban on anti-personnel landmines. His personal commitment led to a one-million-dollar additional United States contribution to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan to support humanitarian demining efforts there.

The United States has consistently supported the demining efforts of the United Nations. We have provided more than $16 million to support the United Nations demining activities in Afghanistan. The United States military also trained Afghan civilian refugees in Pakistan in demining in the mid-1980s. The United States established the Mine-Action Centre in Sarajevo and initiated a highly successful and sustainable demining programme in Bosnia, which included the use of a *Superman* comic book as a mine-awareness tool for children. The Bosnian Mine-Action Centre currently functions under the auspices of the United Nations. It will be turned over to Bosnian authorities at the end of this year. The United States has also provided over $16 million in humanitarian demining assistance to Angola, largely through the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, and now through the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. In addition, we are grateful that the United Nations has stepped in to conduct humanitarian demining operations in areas where a traditional bilateral programme is not possible, but all of us together must do more.

The United States has announced the Demining 2010 Initiative because what we have done so far, as welcome as it may be, is not enough to resolve this problem once and for all. The process of mine clearance has begun. We should not content ourselves with simply continuing this process. Now it is time for international organizations, landmine-affected countries and donor countries to dedicate themselves to finishing it. Together we must work to ensure that by the year 2010 no child's life is cut short by these deadly weapons. This can be done.

We look forward to continuing the process begun in Ottawa when we host the Global Demining 2010 Conference in Washington, D.C., on 21 and 22 May. Working with other countries, we hope to launch the necessary concerted global campaign to end the humanitarian scourge of landmines once and for all. The United States looks forward to working with the United Nations, the international community, non-governmental organizations and others who are making critical contributions to our common goal: eliminating anti-personnel landmines from the face of the Earth.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt): At the outset, allow me to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the progress achieved with regard to assistance in mine clearance and on the operation of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance.

The General Assembly has been seized with this issue of mine clearance since 1993, and the importance attached to it by the international community is clear to us all; suffice it to refer to the awarding of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

There is no doubt that the existence of all types of mines endangers thousands of human lives and poses political, economic, environmental and social problems to various States. I therefore find it pertinent to refer to the conclusions of the Secretary- General in his report:

> "it is time to define the extent and breadth of the mine problem once and for all. A more precise global assessment of the mine problem is needed, based on the most inclusive possible range of factors, including the political, humanitarian, developmental, economic and security-related." [A/52/679, para. 111]

It is precisely from this standpoint that Egypt, along with other developing countries, holds the firm belief that the enormous financial and technical burdens associated with mine- clearance operations should not be shouldered by the affected States alone. The affected States are in most cases victims in need of the financial and technical assistance necessary to initiate and continue mine-clearance operations. For this reason, we maintain that special attention should be given to the affected developing countries in the planning and execution of United Nations and other specialized agencies' activities and in the deployment of resources in this regard.

Sincere efforts have been made to address the mines issue, most notably by the Ottawa process. However, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which was the product of that process, did not define the legal responsibility of the States which have laid down landmines in the territories of other countries. This prompted the latest session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), held last May in Harare, to adopt a decision which dealt, *inter alia*, with the question of responsibility.

That decision states that the OAU Council of Ministers

> "Underscores the moral responsibility of the countries which masterminded the emplacement of mines in Africa during the Second World War

and/or colonial conflicts and urges the said countries to devote a part of their resources, in particular a reasonable percentage of their military budget, to mine clearance and assistance to mine victims in the affected African countries; [and]

"Calls upon those countries responsible for infesting the African countries with mines to provide those affected countries with all necessary information on demining including data, technical assistance, assessment of surveys, especially maps, as well as the movement of illegal mine transfers". [A/52/465, annex I, decision CM/Dec.363 (LXVI)]

The continued existence of over 22 million landmines scattered on 288,000 acres of Egyptian territory causes serious concern to the Government of Egypt. The overwhelming majority of these landmines go back to the famous battle of El-Alamein in 1942 during the Second World War. The Egyptian concern is compounded by the fact that, so far, the assistance that Egypt — and other States in the same predicament — have received is not adequate given the magnitude and complexity of this enormous task. The Egyptian authorities have started, within existing means and resources, an ambitious plan to clear Egyptian territory of all landmines planted in the course of and since the Second World War. In the period between 1981 and 1991, Egypt managed to clear 11 million landmines. In July 1991, Egypt started a new plan with a view to clearing the more than 22 million landmines that remain by the year 2006.

In this connection, I would like to stress the following points. First, implementing the new plan will pose enormous financial and technical burdens which cannot be carried by the Egyptian Government alone. Secondly, there is an urgent need for those States which planted the landmines on Egyptian territory to present accurate registration or accurate maps indicating the exact locations of the landmines.

Thirdly, the cost of clearing the landmines has increased in view of the fact that a large number of them are buried under thick layers of sands — as deep as six metres below the surface. Fourthly, the existence of those landmines over such huge areas stands in the way of the Egyptian Government's efforts to utilize the natural resources that exist in those areas, and obstructs all development efforts in the western deserts and in Sinai.

The report of the Secretary-General on this agenda item indicates once again that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs considers that the ultimate responsibility for landmine problems lies with the affected States. My delegation does not subscribe to this assertion. We believe that mine clearance is not the sole responsibility of the affected countries. It should be regarded as the responsibility of the international community as a whole, and particularly of those States that masterminded their emplacement. We hope that the Mine Action Centre within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, as the new focal point for mine action, will bear this in mind and redress this notion in the future.

Landmines are a globally grave humanitarian problem. This problem has to be addressed in a comprehensive manner. The cooperation of the international community, in particular that of States that have the ability to provide financial and technical assistance, is the only way to save mankind from the evils of this destructive danger.

In this context I very much welcome the Demining 2010 Initiative proposed this morning by Ambassador Richardson as a contribution to resolving this very important matter.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): The presence of mines and other unexploded devices as a result of armed conflicts continues to be a subject of deep concern to the world community. In fact, as the Secretary-General has stated, there are an estimated 110 million mines buried in the ground in more than 70 countries. Every effort should therefore be made to intensify international cooperation in the field of mine clearance. It is our firm belief that only through concerted international effort can mankind be saved from this scourge.

As is known to all, the Lao People's Democratic Republic experienced a protracted war, and from 1964 to 1973 suffered some of the heaviest aerial bombardment in world history. During the bombing, 2 million tons of ordnance were dropped, and it is now generally agreed that the failure rate may have been as high as 30 per cent.

On 1 August 1995, together with the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund, the Lao Government established a trust fund for unexploded ordnance. A national programme has been initiated, the objectives of which are three: first, to build a national capacity for unexploded ordnance

activities; secondly, to prepare and implement a national unexploded ordnance strategy; and thirdly, to coordinate clearance, surveying, training and community-awareness programmes throughout the country.

Unexploded ordnance clearance operations are now under way in three provinces, with over 270 field staff employed by unexploded ordnance offices and their implementing partners. Many thousands of devices have been removed and about 100 hectares of high-priority land cleared. In Xiengkhouang province alone, for instance, from January to October 1997, 43,225 items of unexploded ordnance were destroyed. These included 15 mines, 34 bombs, 21,300 bomblets and 21,875 various types of other explosive weapons. Together with the destruction of unexploded ordnance, awareness campaigns were launched in the districts of Nong Head, Kham, Paek, Khoune and Phou Koud, where unexploded ordnance still poses a serious threat to people's lives. In these campaigns, we have made use of a variety of available techniques, including television and radio broadcasts, presentations to schools and broad distribution of materials on awareness of unexploded ordnance, such as posters, T-shirts and school materials.

Overall, many initial achievements have been recorded but, to be honest, a lot remains to be done in the years ahead. Our plans include the training of some 250 deminers to complete the staffing requirements for a total of 12 affected provinces, the establishment of unexploded ordnance offices in another four provinces affected by unexploded ordnance and the expansion of awareness and clearance activities to five additional provinces, namely Saravane, Champassak, Sekong, Attapeu and Khammoune.

By 1999, if things go as planned, provincial unexploded- ordnance offices will be established in all the affected provinces of Laos. The Lao national trainers will conduct all basic and refresher training programmes. More importantly, community-awareness activities will be undertaken in all 12 affected provinces. The estimated annual budget for 1998 is $8 million; the same amount is estimated for 1999.

For that purpose, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund will continue to participate in a coordinated resource-mobilization effort aimed at securing the necessary funding for programme operations for both 1998 and 1999, as well as at ensuring the ongoing viability of the programme in the medium- and long-term future.

Allow me to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government and the people of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, to express our sincere thanks to all friendly countries and international organizations for their important financial contributions made so far to the Trust Fund. It is our hope that other friendly countries and international organizations will find it possible to contribute to the Fund and assist us in fulfilling this challenging task.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is now at peace. Our multi-ethnic people are living together in harmony in conditions of solid political stability and are enthusiastically participating in the development of our country. The land which is cleared of mines will remain that way. Imbued with optimism, we will do our utmost to implement our national programme for unexploded-ordnance clearance in order to reach the expected objectives.

Mr. Paguaga Fernández (Nicaragua) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Central American countries of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

The Chinese poet Li Bai said that the beautiful flowers of springtime that before the war had blossomed in the battlefields soon became dry weeds, purpled by the blood of those who had fallen, and that the crickets were left singing around the puddles.

But since then we have made considerable progress, and today in the former battlefields there remain no dry weeds; instead, there are deadly devices that kill innocent people. And, rather than the chirping of the crickets, we hear the cacophony of exploding mines.

In a seminar on international humanitarian law held recently in Managua by the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Jorge Salcedo, an official of that organization, said that children are the ones most affected by the explosion of anti-personnel mines. One of the most recent victims was a 12-year-old child who died in a mined field near Teotecacinte, Nicaragua, near the border with Honduras; and, in the space of about 15 days, eight accidents of this kind were recorded in various parts of Nicaragua, leaving eight children maimed.

Such incidents are now taking place not only in the Central American countries that suffered from armed conflict during the past decade and the beginning of this

decade — namely, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua — but also in Central American States such as Honduras and Costa Rica that were affected along their borders due to the warfare in neighbouring countries. A great number of these mines were laid without warning, markings or plan, which makes them even more dangerous and injurious. As we can see, these hidden weapons of mass destruction continue to cause irreversible damage in Central America, even though the Esquipulas process to achieve final peace in the region has already achieved its objective, putting an end to the armed conflict in Guatemala, and even though it is now seven and five years, respectively, since the civil wars ended in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

The cruelty of these weapons is overwhelming. Every year they kill or cripple thousands, especially children and innocent people who are unfortunate enough to fall victim to this indiscriminate scourge that prolongs the effects of war in times of peace, often long after conflicts have ended. They do not respect truces, ceasefires or the signing of peace agreements. They endanger peacekeeping operations and, in particular, affect civilian populations living in areas where they were laid.

The socio-economic aftermath in mine-affected areas is serious and long-lasting, whether those areas were principal or secondary zones of conflict. The presence of mines hampers the return of refugees and displaced persons, and vast areas of fertile land go uncultivated because of mines, which further heightens demographic pressure in the few land areas available. This jeopardizes economic development and worsens social instability. This is of particular importance in an area where land ownership and acquisition are problems that have persisted for centuries and where the consequent concentration of wealth is one of the main causes of political and social upheaval and the resulting insurrections.

In the affected countries, including those of Central America, the mines were laid in a few hours; however, their removal from fields, mountains and forests requires many years and a huge financial investment in a very complex economic context, bearing in mind the health and re-education costs involved in providing assistance to landmine victims, which constitute a diversion of resources needed for the development of our peoples. Developing nations such as ours cannot easily bear these costs. A landmine can cost less than $3, but its removal can cost $1,000 or more.

Faced with this alarming situation, the international community for some time now has undertaken cooperative demining efforts at the global, regional and subregional levels because the affected countries cannot solve this problem alone.

Mine clearance is therefore an issue of great concern to the Central American region. The international community, in particular the Organization of American States, the European Union, United Nations bodies and various donor countries have undertaken an essential humanitarian commitment: financing and designing mine clearance programmes. However, much remains to be done.

In this context, we welcome the report of the Secretary-General in document A/52/679 on assistance in mine clearance, which comes in response to the request made by the international community in resolution 51/149. The report provides us with a general overview of the work being carried out by the various bodies and specialized agencies of the United Nations. In particular, it highlights the tasks undertaken by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Children's Fund.

In his report the Secretary-General highlights the fact that mine-clearance plans must not be limited to the mere necessity of eliminating mines, but should, if possible, include three elements: first, raising consciousness with regard to the dangers of mines; secondly, mine clearance; and, thirdly, care for the victims. At the same time, it underlines the important role to be played in this area by certain humanitarian non-governmental organizations and numerous mine-clearance programmes being developed in countries in all regions of the world.

The mine-clearance programme in post-conflict Nicaragua perfectly reflects the evolution of the political process of reconciliation, which is the cornerstone of the policy of the Government that I represent and that, by the will of the people, governs the destiny of our nation. Cooperation between the former adversaries was not always harmonious, and on several occasions in the past we had to interrupt demining operations. However, by enabling us to use fertile land once again for agricultural production, the clearance of mines is contributing to relieving both demographic and political pressure and to strengthening national reconciliation. It has been calculated that some 130,000 mines were laid throughout our national territory, and now, after various mine-

clearance operations, some 85,000 mines must still be deactivated.

The Nicaraguan army has designed a mine-clearance programme with foreign financing, with a structure of 11 platoons of sappers operating on three fronts: the northern border, the southern border and targeted areas in the interior. The aim is to facilitate farming activities for more than 20,000 rural families, to demine energy and transport infrastructures and to destroy the 85,000 mines that are still scattered across our national territory in various locations, including around high-tension pylons, electrical substations, bridges, relay stations and areas with radio aerials along the northern and southern borders. We have also implemented a public-awareness and preventive-education campaign, financed by Germany, Denmark, the Swedish International Development Authority, the Organization of American States and the European Union, directed primarily at the rural sector.

It has been calculated that the parties to the conflict in El Salvador planted some 20,000 mines. The objectives were strictly military, and they were not aimed specifically at the civilian population. However, they have had a devastating effect on that population, maiming, killing and rendering land useless for agricultural production. With the assistance of the international community, however, and thanks above all to the cooperation between the former adversaries, we have successfully carried out mine-clearance programmes and mine-awareness programmes with regard to the dangers of these weapons for the civilian population.

The civil conflict in the neighbouring countries of El Salvador and Nicaragua had a harmful effect on Honduras. Along the 190-kilometre border with Nicaragua, where the risk is obvious, there are mines in a radius of about 100 kilometres. The mined areas are on fertile land where tobacco and coffee are the main crops, as well as in forests containing valuable timber. These factors highlight the economic importance of clearing mines from these areas. Along the border with El Salvador, the mines are of a primitive type and cover some 25 kilometres. According to calculations of the Inter-American Defense Board, there are some 30,000 mines in the territory of Honduras that must be cleared. The support of the international community in this effort would be greatly appreciated.

In Costa Rica mine sites have been located some 15 kilometres from the border with Nicaragua, containing about 5,000 landmines, according to the Inter-American Defense Board. One of the Board's programmes trained members of the civilian police in Honduras so that they could undertake mine-clearance activities when they returned to their countries. In Costa Rica the mines are located in difficult, forested terrain, and the operations require many months of work.

Our countries have a saying: "Better to prevent than to regret." This applies directly to the issue we are dealing with. That is why we enthusiastically welcome the signature in Ottawa by 121 States of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. This is the response of the international community aimed at achieving a complete ban on these treacherous and barbarous weapons, which are contrary to international humanitarian law, so that future generations will be free from the suffering of today's civilian victims, in particular children. The Convention will enter into force on the first day of the sixth month following the date of the deposit of the fortieth instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession. We hope that the countries that did not sign the Convention in Ottawa will soon do so, making it a universal instrument.

We are particularly pleased that in drawing up the Convention particular attention was paid to cooperation for demining and assistance to victims, as well as to other fundamental and complementary aspects for the ultimate alleviation of the suffering of the victims.

Mr. Rodríguez San Martín (Bolivia) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: This year, the international community has displayed awareness and determination in joining its efforts to promote a worldwide process whose decisive step was the opening for signature of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction — a ceremony that was held at the beginning of the month in Ottawa, Canada. To date, 122 States have signed the Convention.

The result of a joint effort between Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society, the Convention to ban anti-personnel mines solidifies a common aspiration of mankind, namely, to contribute to the removal of these insidious weapons from the face of the earth. We therefore urge the signatory States to speed up their ratification procedures so that the Convention can enter into force as soon as possible. At the same time, we urge all other countries to join in this effort.

The treaty represents a solid international humanitarian commitment to alleviate the cruel and indiscriminate suffering caused by mines which have been placed throughout the world, affecting innocent civilian populations, and also to provide assistance to facilitate their rehabilitation and their social reintegration. It is also a binding instrument to promote trust and the consolidation of peace, for as the mines are cleared and destroyed, a more harmonious coexistence will be established among peoples and trends toward integration will be facilitated.

The Convention also establishes a legal framework whose norms will contribute to encouraging efforts towards mine clearance. We also feel that the United Nations mine clearance programmes will have a very positive effect.

Equally encouraging are the statements of the Secretary-General that the humanitarian element in these mine-clearance activities will not diminish, through the application of criteria which comply with all the demands which the Organization is facing, as well as those arising from peacekeeping operations.

One hundred million mines are laid throughout the world causing some 26,000 victims every year. Given these horrifying figures, Bolivia welcomes and applauds the commitment of various States to strengthen the United Nations mine clearance programmes by providing invaluable economic, human and technical support.

My country supports the strengthening of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance and also encourages the data bank on information regarding the danger of landmines and mine clearance techniques. It seems that the major contributions must come from those countries who are responsible for producing, stockpiling and exporting mines.

Mr. Santos (Mozambique): Allow me to begin by joining previous speakers in expressing my delegation's satisfaction at the successful outcome of the Ottawa process as illustrated by the recent signing by a significant number of States of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

My country is proud to have contributed to this milestone event, and it was among the first to sign the Convention, thus responding positively to the call by the peoples of the world to see our planet free from these horrible weapons. The recently concluded Convention is only the beginning of the hard work ahead, which will ensure a universal ban of landmines as our collective goal.

Indeed, in February this year, during the Fourth International NGO Conference on Landmines, held in Maputo, Mozambique, my Government approved a resolution prohibiting, with immediate effect, the production, commercialization, utilization and non-authorized transportation of anti-personnel landmines in the territory of Mozambique.

The elimination of landmines has truly become a global cause. It is only through this that we can show respect for all those innocent civilians, especially women, children and the elderly, who have fallen victim to these weapons both in times of war and in times of peace. The international community has an obligation to ensure that within a foreseeable time-frame no one else will be maimed or killed by landmines. As we celebrate yet another important achievement on the diplomatic front, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, as the new focal point, is provided with adequate resources to carry out its role, given its accumulated expertise in the field of mine-clearance and in assisting victims in their recovery process.

International assistance and cooperation are key elements in the implementation process, especially in assisting mine-affected countries to develop national programmes to promote awareness of landmines and the rehabilitation of victims of landmines and their full participation in society, called for in General Assembly resolution 51/149, as well as in other relevant United Nations resolutions. As the Secretary-General stated recently, the curse of landmines affects every aspect of the work of the United Nations, from peace and security to health and development.

With the conclusion of the Ottawa process, it is our hope that concerted international efforts will be made to ensure that the 10 million anti-personnel mines produced every year and the other millions still on the ground do not threaten present and future generations. We must work together to ensure that all those who still have doubts about the horrible humanitarian consequences of using anti-personnel mines are persuaded to join us by signing the Convention and to make it a universal instrument. We must also together strive to persuade all those still reluctant that they should use their know-how in the field of anti-personnel mines for the benefit of all

mankind, and to make sure that our efforts are not jeopardized.

Now that we have succeeded in negotiating and concluding such an important international instrument in record time, we must also work resolutely to guarantee that its provisions are fully and unconditionally implemented by all countries, including those that are still hesitant to join the Convention. In this connection, Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Mozambique, stated at the auspicious moment of the signing of the Convention in Ottawa,

> "there is the need to translate this commitment and resolve into concrete actions, the implementation of which will enable this important instrument to enter into force as soon as possible so that the monitoring mechanism which has already been agreed upon can be put into practice and our expected results can be achieved".

It is only the eradication of the prevailing threat of anti-personnel mines that can enable countries like my own to effectively address vital issues related to national development, particularly in rural areas. It is for these reasons that the issue of demining and assistance to victims of landmines is of paramount importance to my Government.

The accelerated demining programme under way in Mozambique with the assistance of the international community, though still modest in terms of responding to the great challenges facing us today, constitutes an important contribution towards attaining the objectives. The programme aims at developing and further strengthening mine-clearance capacity, including the acquisition and utilization of new demining technologies, the creation of a data bank, and the training of Mozambicans so that they can operate autonomously within the next few years. Moreover, discussions are also under way with a view to creating a national non-governmental organization devoted to the issue of mine clearance, with the necessary transparency, accountability and operational efficiency to attract the necessary funding to sustain its operations in the years ahead. Such an organization would complement the work being carried out by the Government through the national Demining Commission. Members' generous assistance in all these endeavours will be highly appreciated.

May I conclude by stating that Mozambique is a sponsor of the draft resolution before the Assembly today.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on the item "Assistance in mine clearance" just a few days after Argentina, along with many other countries, signed in Ottawa the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

My delegation takes this opportunity to express its gratitude to the countries that led the Ottawa process, namely, Austria, Belgium, Canada and Norway. Our thanks also go to Ambassador Selebi of South Africa, who presided over the Oslo Diplomatic Conference and guided the negotiations with such wisdom.

We also wish to express our gratitude to the Princess of Wales, to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and its Coordinator Ms. Jody Williams, to the International Committee of the Red Cross and to all those people who worked with conviction and determination to move this praiseworthy initiative forward.

Argentina, convinced of the importance of this issue, is trying, to the extent possible, to help find a solution to the problems caused by anti-personnel mines through national, regional and global activities. It has declared a moratorium on the export, sale or transfer of all anti-personnel mines, without exception. It has ratified the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and has taken legislative steps to approve the Amended Protocol II of the Convention. It participated actively in the Oslo Diplomatic Conference, which concluded successfully with the adoption of the Convention on a total ban on anti-personnel mines.

During the negotiations at the Oslo Conference, part of Argentina's efforts were aimed at avoiding the prolongation of open-ended situations in mined areas. On this point, I would like to recall that at the International Meeting on Mine Clearance, held at Geneva in 1995, Argentina asked that its commitment to meeting the cost of mine clearance in the Malvinas Islands be classed as an *ex gratia* contribution to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance established in resolution 48/7, adopted on 19 October 1993.

Moreover, Argentina has provided information on personnel who are trained in each of the stages of mine clearance so that they can be included on the list that the

United Nations Secretariat draws up of people who could be of service to the Organization.

Within the framework of peacekeeping operations, Argentina has participated tangibly in mine-clearance operations and is continuing to do so. This is what our unit of engineers has been doing in the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission without interruption since 1993.

Argentina has also been involved in various mine-clearance operations in Central America within the framework of the Organization of American States.

In order to share experience gained in this area, Argentina is involved in organizing a mine-clearance course to be held in Buenos Aires at the Peacekeeping Operations Training Centre.

Particular mention should go to the mine-clearance work of the White Helmets in Angola, with the assistance of Italy, as the Secretary-General has pointed out in document A/52/586.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the problem caused by anti-personnel mines is completely different from that of other areas. There are no major security concerns in Latin America preventing countries from moving ahead in accordance with resolutions adopted by the Organization of American States. As was pointed out in the statement made by Uruguay on behalf of the Southern Cone Common Market, Bolivia and Chile in the First Committee, our countries are inspired by the integration, cooperation and the resolve to contribute to stability and global security through individual and regional measures to promote peace.

Last August the Rio Group spoke at the highest level regarding the signing of the Ottawa Convention and undertook to work in all forums to ensure the universality of the objectives of that instrument. Furthermore, on 10 November last, the Presidents of Argentina, Mr. Carlos Saúl Menem, and of Brazil, Mr. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, signed a joint declaration on anti-personnel mines. In the declaration they stated that the fact that the decision by the countries of the Rio Group to sign the Ottawa Convention was a guarantee for the entire region and a measure for mutual confidence between their armed forces.

Both Presidents emphasized that the accession of all South American countries to the Ottawa Convention confirms the image of South America as a region with a vocation for peace, understanding, cooperation and progress.

Finally, both leaders expressed their intention to cooperate closely in the field of mine clearance. In that spirit, Argentina is working with the other countries of the region to attain the objective set out in the resolutions adopted by the Organization of American States: to make our continent the first on the planet to be free of anti-personnel mines.

The persistence of regional conflicts and the resurgence of instability in various areas make it necessary to work towards a security system based on prevention, cooperation and the building of trust.

The complete eradication of the problem of anti-personnel landmines would be a concrete solution for millions of people who every day face the possibility of falling victim to these weapons. But more is needed. Cooperation in mine clearance, assistance to victims and development must receive particular attention, although they can be costly. The risk and effort are well worth it, since it is a matter of alleviating suffering and paving the way for progress.

Argentina will continue to work in all forums to promote a universal ban on anti-personnel mines. An authentic political commitment must be made, and a coordinated approach must be taken to provide an urgent response to the humanitarian crisis caused by these weapons. At the same time, Argentina will continue to provide assistance to peoples that need it in order to free themselves from the scourge of landmines.

For all these reasons, we recommend and hope for the adoption of the draft resolution before us without a vote.

Mr. Farhadi (Afghanistan): War-stricken Afghanistan is the country most afflicted by dense landmine contamination.

Armed conflict in Afghanistan is not over. However, landmines will continue to take their toll in maimings and deaths long after the days of armed conflict. This, unfortunately, is the plight of all heavily mined countries.

Landmines also constitute a great obstacle to the return of refugees and other displaced persons in Afghanistan.

The Government of the Islamic State of Afghanistan has studied the text of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which was adopted in Oslo on 18 September 1997. The Government of Afghanistan has decided to implement practically the main terms of the Convention, even if, on the other side, the Taliban occupation mercenaries continue to lay mines.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan welcomed the signing of the Convention by 121 States in Ottawa. States parties to the treaty will have four years to destroy existing stockpiles and 10 years to clear all anti-personnel mines from the ground. This time limit, in the case of Afghanistan, can be observed only if the mine-clearance programme is adequately enlarged.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan will sign the Convention in the near future and without delay, after studying the practical modalities of its implementation.

We welcome the meeting for planning future victim-assistance strategies, to be held in February 1998 in Cambodia. That meeting involves the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and interested national societies and non-governmental organizations.

According to the programme of work for 1997 of the United Nations mine-clearance programme in Afghanistan, conducted by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA), countries such as Canada, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom have made contributions and pledges in response to the UNOCHA consolidated appeal. This was the situation on 17 March 1997. We expect other donor countries, such as Australia, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the United States, listed in the programme of work, to take part in mine clearance in Afghanistan, though the amount and nature of their contribution have not been registered. We also appeal to other countries, such as Japan, Italy, China, Finland, New Zealand, France and the Russian Federation to consider making a large contribution to the mine-clearance programmes in Afghanistan. The Afghan nation will remain profoundly grateful to all those countries that have begun to make a contribution in this field or will, hopefully, begin to do so in the near future.

Countries that have produced all kinds of anti-personnel mines during recent decades and have used them in their armed interventions in other countries, and those that have sold or transferred anti-personnel mines to warring factions in Asia, Africa and Latin America, today bear the historical responsibility of compensating for their past deeds by massively contributing to the mine-clearance campaigns of victim countries and by assisting in the treatment of children and others mutilated by mines. This point needs to be included in the texts of all documents concerning mine clearance and must seriously be put into practice.

The preambular part of the draft resolution under consideration mentions new technological progress on the basis of which the safety, effectiveness and professionalism of mine-clearance operations can advance throughout the world.

However, millions of undetectable mines are defying these technological innovations and threatening the lives and safety of human beings. The technology involved in the production of anti-personnel landmines made mainly of plastic and with little metal has evolved very rapidly in recent decades. These types of mines are not easily detectable and can lie in wait for their victim — the child who happens to step on one — for many years. This has been a tragic and deplorable example of the progress of technology.

At last year's session, my delegation expressed its disappointment at the lack of progress in the technology of detecting this intractable kind of landmine. It is a shame that those highly developed countries that boast about their technological progress related to outer space or deep-sea exploration have made no really effective technological advances here on earth in the detection of the so-called minimum-metal plastic mines. The technology that was so expeditious in making the advances that led to those undetectable mines has been inactive when it comes to inventing ways to detect those same mines. Technology was readily the cause of this ruinous problem. Unfortunately, technology has so far deplorably failed to play a part in any solution.

Technological research needs to be more than redoubled to improve the means of detecting plastic mines. Research companies in the private sector may not find this kind of research a promising source of profit. They will not engage in any exchange of technological information because of their financial rivalry with each other. The problem must therefore be dealt with by the public sector, and research centres must be mobilized by the Governments of the highly advanced countries. Global coordination is needed to create effective

technology to remedy the calamity of landmines that continue to elude detection, for they are the true hidden killers.

Mr. Matri (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The problem of mines and other material remnants of war is one of the basic concerns of the United Nations. The existence of mines is a direct threat to people and material goods, one that makes large areas of land uninhabitable and economically useless. My delegation therefore believes that the discussion of these problems is of great importance, demonstrating as it does the international community's determination to deal with the problems that mines are creating in many countries.

The Secretary-General's report in document A/52/679 inventories the activities of the United Nations system in the area of assistance to mine-clearance activities. My delegation appreciates the efforts made by the United Nations in this field, especially its assistance to the countries that are faced with the problem. However, we must note here that the report is disappointing in many respects. Notwithstanding its exhaustive nature, this report, like previous ones, deals solely with the problem of the mines that affect a number of countries in the aftermath of internal conflicts. We have already drawn attention to these shortcomings at previous sessions, and we do so again today because we believe that this report would have been more realistic and more complete had it drawn attention to countries where old mines are continuing to destroy property and kill individuals. Had the report dealt with this aspect of the question, it would have reflected our concerns and those of other countries and would have responded to the appeal made by the former Secretary-General in An Agenda for Peace [A/47/277], in which he noted the need to address the serious problem of landmines, many tens of millions of which remain scattered in present or former conflict zones.

My country is one that has suffered the effects of mines in regions were war was waged long ago. The sufferings of the Libyan people began 50 years ago, during the Second World War, when the opposing forces laid a great number of mines and booby traps of various types over vast areas of Libyan territory. Factual studies have shown that there are millions of such mines. A study by United Nations experts issued in document A/38/383 also deals with this question and notes that during the various North African campaigns the Allied and Axis forces laid millions of landmines, especially anti-tank mines. Estimates range from 5 million to 19 million.

Of even greater concern and even more regrettable, when the Axis and Allied forces left Libya they abandoned this material residue without taking the trouble to provide information or maps indicating the location of minefields, thus causing the loss of thousands of lives and people maimed for life. Many studies confirm this fact, including that issued as document A/49/357 and Add.1 and 2, in which two statistics, *inter alia*, are reported, namely, 5,670 deaths and 4,935 persons permanently handicapped. These data are corroborated by the study in document A/38/383, which notes that in the 30 years since the Second World War, in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya alone explosions of material remnants of war had killed approximately 4,000 persons and wounded more than 8,000 others, the majority of which, in both cases, were children.

Aside from human loss, the existence of mines has impeded the construction of roads and railways and made the exploitation of natural resources impossible. It has also made it hard for us to combat desertification and expand agricultural reform in certain regions. A United Nations report published four years ago notes that minefields cover 27 per cent of Libya's arable land and that the coastal region, which is the most fertile area of the country, cannot be exploited because it is heavily mined. The presence of mines has also prevented the exploitation of mineral resources, principally iron and gypsum. The same report also notes that oil prospecting is affected by the cost of demining potential oil-producing zones.

Over the last three decades the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya has attempted to deal with the problem of mines and has drawn up several plans for that purpose, including programmes for public awareness and training in mine clearance. Despite the results, it has become clear that national demining efforts are beset by a number of problems. The zones involved are extensive and our knowledge in this field is limited. The gravity of the situation is increased by the fact that we have no data concerning the mines and no maps to indicate their locations.

In confronting these problems, Libya, like other countries, would welcome any type of mine-clearance assistance the United Nations could provide. However, we must reiterate here that no matter how ample that assistance might be, it will be impossible to rid Libyan territory completely of mines and other explosive devices and that, therefore, it should be the responsibility of those who laid such mines in the territories of other

countries to assist in demining and compensating the victims. This principle is recognized by a number of regional organizations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference among them. The General Assembly also recognized it when, in resolution 35/71, it called upon the States concerned to make available forthwith to the affected States all information on the areas in which such mines were placed, including maps indicating the position of those areas, and information concerning the types of mines. The resolution also requested that the States responsible for laying mines compensate the States affected by them for the losses they have suffered.

In resolution 36/188, the Assembly supported the demand of the States affected by the implantation of mines and the presence of other remnants of war on their lands for compensation for the losses incurred from the States responsible. By resolutions 37/215, 38/162 and 39/167, the Assembly clearly established that the removal of the material remnants of war, particularly mines, is the responsibility of the States that left these devices. It is the duty of these States to provide the necessary information and technical assistance for demining operations, as well as to compensate the countries for the loses they have suffered.

We are particularly interested in the implementation of resolutions adopted by international and regional organizations regarding the elimination of material remnants of wars. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya does not deny that some of the countries responsible for laying mines in our country have provided information, but this information has been insufficient. With the few maps we have been provided by Italy and Germany, it is impossible to establish where mines have been laid in our lands. This is why we reiterate our appeal to these two countries and to other countries that laid mines in our country to inform us as to the types of mines laid, the dimensions of the minefields and the mine-laying techniques used, as well as to provide the necessary technical assistance to find and destroy these mines.

Libya was not responsible for starting the Second World War, and our people should not have to bear its tragic consequences. The countries responsible for starting this war and for bringing it to Libya should assume the responsibility for the problems the mines have been causing for more than 50 years. Libya once again congratulates Germany and Italy for having shown the willingness to cooperate with us in trying to detect and destroy these devices. We hope that their promises will translate into specific actions and that this new approach will be a first step towards fully implementing the General Assembly resolutions concerning the problem of the material remnants of war by providing assistance for demining operations and compensation for the losses caused by these mines. Any attempts on the parts of these States to escape their responsibilities must only add to them, as the seeds of death sown by their armies rest in our soil and continue to cut down innocent lives.

We praise the efforts of the United Nations and the international community in general to assist in mine clearance. However, we are concerned that up until now these efforts are focused on the problems caused by mines laid in specific situations. To us, this bias is unsatisfactory. We continue to reiterate before this Assembly that an analysis of this question must cover all types of mines, be they new or old, laid many years ago or just recently. They are all deadly to human beings and destructive of material possessions; their consequences are the same. They hamper the productive use of agricultural land and restrict economic activity. In general, the existence of mines, old or new, constitutes a major obstacle to the protection of the environment and to development — not to mention the human tragedies and serious destruction of property resulting from this problem. This is a real challenge that the international community must face. If it does not, the problem will persist and its horrors continue to haunt our conscience, and these mines will continue to be a source of fear and uncertainty for generations to come.

Mr. Rider (New Zealand): Our debate today takes place just two weeks after the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction was opened for signature in Ottawa. Over 120 countries have already signed this instrument, including New Zealand. We intend to ratify the treaty as soon as possible. We call on as many other Member States as possible to do likewise.

New Zealand appreciates that some countries were not in a position immediately to sign the new treaty. Interim steps, such as moratoria and bans on export are welcome temporary measures. But the goal is a complete ban on the use, stockpiling, transfer and production of these weapons, and the international community will continue to demand that this be achieved. Countries who signed the Ottawa Convention must therefore maintain the pressure to ensure its universalization.

Even now, however, it is clear that a new international norm has been established, banning this class of indiscriminate weapon. We must now capitalize on the momentum created by the Ottawa process. For, despite the far-reaching provisions governing the use of landmines in the future, millions of mines have already been laid in over 60 countries around the world. The Secretary-General makes clear in his report in document A/52/679 the extent of the human suffering mines continue to cause, and it is clear that the international community still has a lot of work ahead of it in the area of coordinated mine action.

The Ottawa conference provided a valuable opportunity to discuss humanitarian mine-action issues, and our thanks go to the Government of Canada for its ongoing efforts to raise the profile of mine-clearance work. New Zealand participated fully in roundtable discussions, which revealed some promising initiatives. One such was the Swiss proposal for an international centre for humanitarian demining. This will help us ensure that we capitalize on the increasing body of experience and knowledge held by national deminers and by non-governmental and international organizations.

We note also the worthy goals of the United States' Demining 2010 Initiative. The undertaking to eradicate all landmines that threaten civilian populations by the year 2010 is an ambitious but inspiring goal.

Future plans and commitments enunciated this morning suggest to us a new surge in efforts to rid the world of landmines. But we should not forget the valuable work that has again been completed in the field in 1997.

New Zealand has continued to participate in mine-clearance work in Angola, Cambodia and Mozambique. In addition, we have this year commenced participation in the National Unexploded Ordnance Programme in Laos. We have also continued to provide ongoing financial support for the Cambodian Mine-Action Centre and the Laos Programme. All this represents a commitment to ongoing mine-clearance efforts in our region.

Further reflecting that commitment, New Zealand hosted an Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum demining seminar in April 1997. We were pleased in particular to welcome senior representatives from the national programmes in Laos, Mozambique and Cambodia, as well as from the United Nations, and from other demining contributors. The seminar provided an opportunity for participants to share experiences, compare operational techniques and gain first-hand experience of some of the practical elements and techniques of demining field operations.

New Zealand took the opportunity to place on record its belief in the importance of developing indigenous mine-clearance capacities in countries plagued by landmines. This is, we believe, a vital element of post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Like other Regional Forum seminar participants, however, we consider that the development of national demining capacities does not detract from the valuable role which the United Nations plays in international mine-clearance work.

The United Nations has an essential role in coordinating mine-clearance work across the globe. For many countries, it is a port of first call before the establishment of national programmes and the mobilization of the resources of non-governmental organizations. For that reason, New Zealand has been in the forefront of calls for greater rationalization of the work of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the other United Nations agencies responsible for mine clearance.

As an example of the sort of duplicative processes we want to do away with, let me just note that New Zealand has been required in the past year to negotiate three different Memorandums of Agreement for demining programmes with which we are involved, all of which were presented to us in markedly different forms. That was hardly efficient.

The Secretary-General's decision to entrust the Department of Peacekeeping Operations with overall responsibility for United Nations demining efforts now provides us with a timely opportunity to put in place structures and a mode of operation which meet both the needs of operational demining in the context of peacekeeping operations and the hugely greater challenge of humanitarian demining. Following on from the discussions in Ottawa, it is imperative that the humanitarian aspects of the United Nations mine-clearance work continue to be strengthened and coordinated under this new structure.

As the draft resolution before us in document A/52/L.69 recognizes, what is required is the development of an overall strategy for mine action internationally, with the United Nations as the focal point, to allow for the effective coordination and channelling of resources and the new initiatives flowing from the Ottawa process.

The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is well placed to carry out a number of core functions in support of humanitarian demining, in addition to its operational responsibilities. Maintenance and expansion of the landmine database to determine the scope of the problem is one such function. Others are evaluation of new demining technologies and the provision of quality control in mine-clearance activities. We are eagerly awaiting details of the structure of the new mine action service, which will carry out these tasks.

But the real work of removing landmines, increasing mine awareness and developing indigenous capacities will be carried out by other United Nations agencies, mainly the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), drawing on the Voluntary Trust Fund. New Zealand has contributed regularly to the Trust Fund, with our annual if modest contribution of $NZ 250,000 in 1997, bringing our total contribution over the last three years to $NZ 600,000.

Since the Secretary-General has now given management of that Fund to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, regular contributors like New Zealand will want to see in place effective and efficient methods for its disbursement to the operational agencies. We believe the time has now come for the Mine Action Service to be funded from the regular budget, with Trust Fund contributions being used to support field activities, bringing immediate benefit to the communities threatened by landmines.

New Zealand was proud to be among the more than 120 countries which in Ottawa dedicated themselves to outlawing anti-personnel landmines. We are equally proud to be a sponsor of the draft resolution before us today. Its adoption by consensus will demonstrate the whole international community's determination to address the humanitarian carnage caused by these weapons.

Mr. Mekprayoonthong (Thailand): Today the delegation of Thailand would like to share with the Assembly our thoughts and concerns on the issue of assistance in mine clearance.

The issue of landmines has been given extra attention this year, mainly due to attempts by Governments and non-governmental organizations to ban anti-personnel landmines. Our position towards landmines is clear. Thailand does not produce or export landmines. We firmly believe that there is no greater crime than indiscriminately to maim or kill non-combatant and innocent civilians, particularly women and children. This crime must be stopped. In this conviction, Thailand is proud to be among the signatories of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, signed in Ottawa earlier this month. Our position in the First Committee and elsewhere also reflects our belief.

In every forum, however, we have also consistently pointed out the other equally important sides of the problem concerning landmines, namely, mine clearance and humanitarian assistance to victims of landmines. We firmly believe that international attempts should not be limited to or concentrated on the banning of landmines, but should also include financial and technical assistance to mine-affected countries, specifically in mine clearance and humanitarian assistance to the victims and survivors of landmines. We should not only ban the use of anti-personnel mines in the future, but also alleviate the sufferings of the present and the devastating results of the past. These efforts should go in tandem.

Thailand is a victim of mine use, especially in the seven provinces along the Thai-Cambodian border, as a result of spillover of the armed conflicts in that country. Every year, the Royal Thai Army medical units and the government hospitals in the border areas have provided and still continue to provide medical, prosthetic and humanitarian assistance to hundreds of Thai and Cambodian victims of mines. Some of them may be Thai soldiers and policemen on patrol duty, but most are villagers, farmers on their way to the fields, boys and girls on their way to schools, hunters back home from the forests. In this matter, we are grateful for the humanitarian projects of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) aimed at helping affected Thai civilians along the border.

We are fully aware of the sufferings of our people and our neighbours caused by landmines and we have tried to cope on our own, as well as to extend assistance in mine clearance to other affected countries. Thailand has been particularly active in helping with demining efforts in Cambodia, providing both bilateral and, through the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, multilateral assistance. During 1992 and 1993, two Thai engineering battalions were sent into Cambodia to clear landmines on Route No. 5 from Poipet to Battambang, providing a safe road home for many Cambodian refugees. The Royal Thai Army Engineering Corps has for some time also been implementing a

programme to manufacture demining machines, although the programme was unfortunately discontinued in 1996 due to lack of funds. In the future, we also plan to contribute mine-clearance units and canine detection teams to United Nations peacekeeping operations under the United Nations stand-by arrangements system. Recently, our Deputy Foreign Minister announced in Ottawa the Royal Thai Government's commitment to help clear all mines along the Thai-Cambodian border within the next three years. In order to carry out this tall order, we need help from the international community, in the form of both technological and financial assistance.

From our direct experiences in the field in Thailand as well as in Cambodia, we have learned that personal capabilities, canine detection and other indigenous demining techniques are simply not adequate in the face of the severity and magnitude of the problem. In order to accelerate the pace of mine clearance in relation to the increasing number being planted, and to mitigate unnecessary risks to life and limb of deminers, more advanced technology in mine clearance is needed. This is why we attach particular importance to the acquisition of these new and advanced technologies. We feel that they are indispensable to the success of our battle against minefields in and around our country.

In this light, I cannot overemphasize the extreme significance of assistance in technology and training. Thailand hopes — and I believe this is a hope shared by many other countries affected by landmines — that a training programme on the technological aspects of mine clearance will be provided on a non-selective basis to all mine-affected countries. An international team of experts to disseminate these advanced techniques and train the trainers would be highly appreciated. At least it will show that the international community does care and wants to help. The realization of such a project would be a comfort to the mine-affected countries.

It is a tragedy that, while a mine can be laid at the cost of less than $30, clearing one mine can cost $1000 or more, not to mention the expenses of surgery and prosthetic care for the victims and humanitarian assistance for the victims' families. This is a heavy burden for mine-affected countries.

As committed as Thailand is to solving this problem, we have to accept that, like most other mine-affected countries, our resources are limited. Thailand has only three operational demining units, with a capacity of 2,500 to 3,000 mines per year for each unit. To help us cope with this problem, which is not of our creation, I would therefore stress the importance of the contribution of the international community in this fight. It is our hope that this will be encouraged and facilitated under article 6 of the Ottawa Convention, on international cooperation and assistance for mine clearance, once the Convention enters into force.

In this regard, we also welcome the United States' Demining 2010 Initiative, as well as the donations and pledges made by Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and other donors, which will no doubt make a further valuable contribution to the international attempt to address this problem. We also note with appreciation the noble roles of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, international agencies and many other concerned non-governmental organizations in providing humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance.

Thailand also strongly feels that it is only just and logical that those who manufacture, export and earn profits from landmines should have special responsibility in bearing at least a major portion of the costs of financial and technical aid to mine-affected countries, rehabilitation programmes for the stricken societies and communities and humanitarian assistance to the victims and to mine survivors themselves and their families.

Allow me to say a few words concerning the role of the United Nations in the international efforts towards a mine-free world. In 1994, Thailand welcomed the establishment of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance. We would therefore urge all who care and who are in a position to do so to contribute as much as they can afford. We note that, while there are more than 60 mine-affected countries and territories around the world, including my country, United Nations landmines programmes exist in only 11 of them. Therefore, much remains to be done, and it is the common responsibility of the international community to support the Trust Fund in carrying out its tasks.

We in Thailand have witnessed the laudable work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which has supported many mine-clearance and mine-awareness programmes in Cambodia, as well as training programmes for Cambodian deminers. We share UNDP's belief that mine-clearance assistance involves national

rehabilitation and development concerns as much as it does humanitarian concerns.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) for its past role as a coordinator of humanitarian mine-clearance programmes. The Secretary-General has proposed in his United Nations reform programme to discontinue the DHA in its present form and to transfer demining activities to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. It is our belief that long-term mine-clearance programmes with humanitarian or national rehabilitation elements, on the one hand, and the operational demining activities concerning the safety of peacekeepers, on the other, are two distinctly different activities. In this regard, we would like to stress that humanitarian mine-clearance policies, practices and activities established by DHA should remain unaffected by the United Nations reform programme if we are ever to alleviate the suffering caused and move on to rid this planet of these seeds of death and disability through international cooperation.

Mr. Takht-Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Last year, through the adoption of resolution 51/149 under the agenda item "Assistance in mine clearance", the General Assembly recognized the tremendous threat posed to human life by the millions of landmines laid in a large number of countries. Uncleared anti-personnel landmines pose one of the most serious humanitarian challenges facing the world today. Their indiscriminate use kills or maims innocent civilians and invariably disrupts post-conflict social and economic development programmes. Victims of landmines place a significant financial burden upon mine-stricken States and their diminishing resources. Moreover, mine-contaminated territories have rendered huge expanses of the world's agricultural lands unproductive and uninhabitable.

Without a doubt, this ominous trend must be reversed, in the interest of humanity and of international peace and security. Top priority must be given to mine clearance. All existing resources allocated to work in this field by the United Nations and by individual countries must be pooled, and the development and availability of improved tools for mine clearance, including mechanical equipment, must be supported.

The situation we are facing today as a result of landmine use is disastrous. The lack of improved mine detection and clearance technology, together with the ever-increasing number of landmines being laid annually world-wide, means that the efforts of the international community to address the global mine crisis must be tenacious and painstaking.

My country has had bitter experience in this regard. During the Iran-Iraq war, nearly 16 million landmines and unexploded sub-munitions were laid in Iran, covering more than 4 million hectares. Over the past nine years, we have embarked upon massive mine-clearance operations in order to enable civilians displaced by the war to return to their homes and resume normal life. We have destroyed a significant number of mines and unexploded devices laid in our territories, by manual demining methods and without access to any records or other documentation. However, it needs to be stressed that the mines laid in our previously occupied territories have taken huge expanses of our agricultural land out of production and rendered them uninhabitable. More important, the innocent civilians living in those regions are occasionally killed or maimed, which places a significant burden upon our society.

It is encouraging to note that during the past two years efforts in the field of mine action programmes by the United Nations, individual countries and non-governmental organizations have been intensified and that coordination within the United Nations system has improved. Moreover, governmental and non-governmental organizations have launched campaigns to provide resources and technology for mine-clearance operations, and a number of international conferences have been held or are being planned to examine ways and means to tackle this problem effectively. However, more needs to be done both within the United Nations system and in the international community at large.

Towards realizing the goal of speedy and effective mine clearance, we consider the following elements imperative. First, mine-clearance activities should be consistent with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular the principles of full respect for the sovereignty of States, the territorial integrity of States, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, and the sovereign equality of all States.

Secondly, serious attempts should be made to improve mine-clearance technology and to transfer newer technologies to developing countries, particularly to mine-affected countries.

Thirdly, the United Nations should act as an international focal point for the planning and coordination

of research on improved mine-clearance technology, as well as on transfer of technologies for mine clearance.

Fourthly, various types of mine-clearance equipment continue to remain subject to discriminatory and unjustifiable export-control regimes. The United Nations needs to be empowered to ensure that no restrictions are applied that would hinder or otherwise impede in any manner access to technology for mine clearance. At the same time, the United Nations should be provided with the financial means necessary to fulfil this task.

Fifthly, all States should be encouraged to halt the indiscriminate deployment of anti-personnel landmines.

Sixthly, efforts to find an alternative defensive means to replace anti-personnel landmines should be intensified.

I would like in conclusion to state that, as a major victim of anti-personnel landmines, the Islamic Republic of Iran supports any genuine initiative that deals effectively with this category of weapon.

Mr. Parra (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Colombia attaches special importance to the item before the Assembly because my country is committed to all causes relating to humanitarian law, and because our very flesh and blood have suffered the effects of the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines. My country understands and agrees with the principles that motivate today's action by the international community: prohibiting parties to a conflict from choosing from an unlimited range of ways and means of combat; prohibiting the use of weapons and means of combat that cause excessive damage or unnecessary suffering; and drawing the essential distinction between combatants and civilians not involved in the fighting.

These devices are produced and sold by some 45 countries at an absurdly low cost — which encourages their use. The number of mines therefore increases every year: the figure today is estimated at 120 million mines laid in more than 60 countries, most of them developing countries, including Colombia. The death and injury caused by these devices largely affect innocent people — rural women and children — who are not actively involved in a conflict. They leave pain and suffering in their wake, not only among the direct victims but also among the civilian population in general, who witness powerlessly and with indignation the level of dehumanization caused by war.

Also of concern are the high cost of detecting and destroying anti-personnel mines; the small number of mines that have been deactivated compared with the growing number laid each year; the difficulty of rebuilding urban and rural areas that have been mined during a conflict and of making them economically viable once more; and the task of providing adults and — most particularly, children — with education and information on prevention, identification and management to teach them how to survive in areas strewn with explosives.

My country notes the advances made by the international community in this sphere, especially the signing of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which Colombia signed at Ottawa on 3 December 1997 and which we hope to ratify as soon as our domestic legal requirements have been filled.

But the major remaining task lies with the countries that manufacture and sell inhumane devices such as anti-personnel mines. A chain cannot exist without its individual links, and each chain of death begins where the mines are produced and sold, and ends where they are laid to defend territories — where they become virtually permanent given their long life, retaining their destructive power far beyond the duration of the conflict, with effects we all know well.

The repudiation of this kind of weapons is even greater because, unlike others whose use we also reject, they are not aimed at specific material or human objectives on a selective basis, but rather indiscriminately and over time against goods, installations and individuals from civil society. They target innocent victims, producing prolonged cumulative effects which are similar to those of nuclear weapons.

The resolution which we are about to adopt conveys, in addition to its explicit text, the message to nations that have not yet overcome the domestic reasons that prevent them from signing the Ottawa Convention that they should accede to it and, as a result, should start to fulfil their obligations enshrined in article 1, namely, that:

> "Each State Party undertakes never under any circumstances to use anti-personnel mines; to develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer to anyone, directly or indirectly, anti-personnel mines; to assist, encourage or induce,

in any way, anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under this Convention".

Mr. Gorelik (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): The search for ways and means to put an end to the horrible toll taken by the landmine trap, inflicted primarily on the civilian population in a number of countries, has become especially topical in the last few years. The Russian Federation attaches great importance to the international community's mobilization of efforts in overcoming the adverse effects of the threat of mines, which hampers post-conflict reconstruction and the resolution of numerous humanitarian problems.

Russians sympathize with the anguish and pain of landmine victims in numerous locations all over the world. More than 100 thousand explosive devices are discovered and destroyed annually on Russian Federation territory, while direct expenses associated with these operations exceed $25 million dollars yearly.

We acknowledge a ban on production, use, stockpiling, and transfer of anti-personnel mines as the ultimate goal of agreed international action. The Russian Federation calls for gradual progress towards this goal through a number of stages, which would be agreed upon within a certain time-frame while viable alternatives to this type of defensive weaponry are developed. At the present stage, we deem especially important the task of putting into effect Protocol II to the 1980 Convention on Inhumane Weapons, making sure that as many members of the world community as possible become party to it and ensuring that norms and standards introduced by the Protocol are strictly observed. After all, this document is based on a carefully adjusted balance of interests of States, a balance taking into account their real capabilities and their security and self-defense interests.

We are quite aware of the humanitarian component of the grave landmine problem, and we view international cooperation in mine clearance as a significant aspect of addressing the comprehensive issue of post-conflict settlement. Support for moratoriums on exports of anti-personnel landmines is among other short-term priorities. In fact, a few days ago, the President of the Russian Federation signed a decree extending for a period of five years the moratorium on exports from our country of non-self-destroying and undetectable anti-personnel landmines.

As regards mine clearance in regional conflict zones, we are thoroughly convinced of the urgency of the task of consolidating the efforts of the international community to use the capacities of both Member States and the United Nations more fully. In this light, we consider that improving coordination between activities of various United Nations organs and making full use of their expertise and resources is a timely matter.

We hope that the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance established by the Secretary-General will shortly have at its disposal resources more significant than what it has today. Should this happen, the Fund will be in a position to play more energetically the leading role in financing research and development programmes for mine clearance, training programmes and mine-threat awareness programmes for civilian populations.

It is also important to strengthen United Nations coordination functions in technical assistance and national capacity-building for mine clearance. We view this task as one of developing fruitful cooperation among the United Nations, regional organizations and States. We note with satisfaction the development in the United Nations of standard rules and procedures for mine-clearance operations. We also deem important the establishment of a central mine-clearance database which would gather all pertinent information.

The problem of landmines is especially acute in the context of United Nations peacekeeping operations. United Nations forces are often deployed in areas with dangerous mine threats. Not infrequently, peacekeepers are killed or maimed by landmines. The great proliferation of these devices causes serious difficulties for the movement of United Nations personnel and hampers fulfilment of tasks such as troop cantonment, demobilization, escorting humanitarian convoys, and so forth.

Please allow me now to mention the mine threat in Tajikistan and in Abkhazia, Georgia, repeatedly noted in General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, a threat which adversely affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the missions of United Nations military observers deployed there and which has serious humanitarian consequences. Russia supports measures undertaken by the Secretary-General to address the landmine problem in these two countries and is willing to make additional contributions, within existing resources, to this noble cause.

Similarly, on a number of occasions the threat of mines has prevented operations of humanitarian missions

on the necessary scale, a phenomenon felt especially strongly by United Nations agencies such as the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

For Russia, issues of cooperation with the United Nations, exchange of expertise and technical, financial and material assistance have a very tangible practical significance. In particular, we are talking about complex and expensive mine- clearance tasks performed in territories and installations within the framework of peacekeeping operations in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Russia is prepared to intensify its participation by providing assistance in mine clearance to countries in need of such help on either a bilateral or multilateral basis. We now have an impressive scientific, technical and industrial capacity and expertise in this area which could be employed in long-term international programmes dealing with mine clearance.

Mr. Wahab (Pakistan): My delegation would like to express its profound appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report, in document A/52/679, on the activities of the United Nations on assistance in mine clearance. It is a comprehensive and highly informative report.

We are happy to see that the issue of uncleared landmines has seized the attention of the international community. Today, the international community is more aware of the magnitude of the problems posed by uncleared landmines. In this regard, we greatly appreciate the efforts of the United Nations in raising public awareness on the issue through various means, including the use of modern information technologies.

We agree with the Secretary General's observation that, while advances have been made, the technological developments have so far been found wanting in their ability to benefit mine action. In order to overcome this obstacle, the Member States involved in the appropriate research and development should increase their efforts to achieve the necessary breakthroughs in a coordinated and transparent manner.

Recently, the focal point for mine action has been moved from the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. It is our earnest hope that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations will carry out its new mandate successfully.

We believe that there is an urgent need for the international community to mount a reinvigorated programme for the elimination of the estimated 100 million landmines which were indiscriminately laid in the past and which are responsible for killing 25,000 people each year. It is estimated that the removal of a single landmine costs between $300 and $1,000. A global demining campaign would therefore require a commitment of more than token resources by all those wishing to respond to this global problem.

Three years ago, the Secretary-General took a highly commendable step to establish the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance. The crucial area, on which the ultimate success of mine-clearance activities depends, is the provision of adequate funding. Unfortunately, we learn from the report of the Secretary-General this year that there has been a year-to-year decline in donations to the Trust Fund.

While in some cases separate funds have been set up to support some country programmes, the question of the funding required for successful mine-clearance operations warrants serious consideration. The removal of landmines is a prerequisite for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of a country. Thus, the process of mine clearance is the process of restoring an environment that allows a society to regain normal life.

In this regard, we would like to draw the attention of the international community to the needs of the people of Afghanistan. The Secretary-General's report pointed out that the response to the 1997 consolidated appeal for a total requirement of $21.9 million for Afghanistan has been slow and disappointing. As of June 1997, only 40 per cent of the total required funding had been received. We hope that the international community will not fail to respond generously to the Secretary-General's appeal for assistance to Afghanistan.

For its part, Pakistan has been making all possible efforts to assist the people of Afghanistan. Thousands of Afghan refugees who have been maimed by the mines have been treated in our medical facilities. Pakistan has also been providing rehabilitation treatment to these victims.

The question of the clearance of landmines that have already been laid needs to be differentiated from the matter of controlling the use of landmines. The latter raises issues that lie in the realm of arms control and

disarmament. These issues will, quite correctly, be dealt with in the Conference on Disarmament.

We are of the view that despite the efforts made so far, the humanitarian problem resulting from the widespread indiscriminate use of landmines will not be alleviated unless the international community addresses important issues. In this regard, adequate steps will have to be taken to secure the widest possible adherence to revised Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. Pakistan will continue to support efforts which seek to promote this objective.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting. The General Assembly will hear the remaining speakers and take action on draft resolution A/52/L.69 tomorrow morning, as the first item.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.